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ABSTRACT

During the summer of 1974 16 students, all experienced teachers, devised an opinionnaire scale concerning the elementary school teacher attitudes toward the elementary school principal. Each investigator conducted interviews, either by telephone or in person, with 25 experienced elementary teachers from several Texas Panhandle districts. The following questions were asked: How do elementary school principals spend their time? What kinds of principals' activities have been most helpful to you? How was your principal selected? What was his background? How should principals be selected? Should teachers be involved in this selection? How should the ideal principal spend his time? What could he do to be of most help to you as a teacher? What principals' activities actually impair your teaching effectiveness? Should the principals' positions be restricted to men or to women? Should teachers be involved in administration of the elementary school? The teachers were also asked to describe the ideal principal. This report is made up of generalizations on the 400 teachers' reactions to these questions. (Author/IRT)

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FOUR HUNDRED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS LOOK AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

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Elementary school teachers with their knowledge, experience, and attitudes are rarely consulted when decisions are made regarding the selection of a principal. This appointment, in most school districts, comes via the superintendent and/or the Board of Education.

This study does not presume that principals should be directly selected by the teachers he/she will supervise but it does intend to raise some questions in this area.

During the summer of 1974 sixteen students, all experienced teachers, devised an opinionnaire scale concerning the elementary school teachers attitudes toward the elementary school principal. Each investigator was to conduct interviews, either by telephone or in person, with twenty-five experienced elementary school teachers. As a result, this study reflects a group of approximately four hundred elementary school teachers. Although, this sampling was not specifically random there was a variety of teachers from several Texas Panhandle districts. Also, the sample included a variety of teachers from differing age groups and levels of assignment in grades K-6.

Some pertinent questions asked were:

1. How do elementary school principals spend their time?
2. What kinds of principals' activities have been most helpful to you?
3. How was your principal selected?

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4. What was his background?
5. How should principals be selected?
6. Should teachers be involved in this selection?
7. How should the ideal principal spend his time?
8. What could he do to be of most help to you as a teacher?
9. What principals' activities actually impair your teaching effectiveness?
10. Should the principals' position be restricted to men? women?
11. Should teachers be involved in administration of the elementary school?
12. Describe the ideal principal.

The format of this report will be generalizing on the 400 teachers' reaction to the above mentioned questions.

HOW DO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS SPEND THEIR TIME?

Clerical work, reports, and similar projects are the major activities of elementary school principals, according to views expressed by these teachers. Other major activities mentioned were: conferring or counseling with parents, working with discipline problems, classroom observation, and attending meetings. Other activities, mentioned less frequently were: taking trips, pupil conferences, lunch room duty, conferring with teachers, public relations, and janitorial work!

Some disturbing responses related were: nothing, don't know, sitting at the desk doing nothing, flirting with certain women teachers, spending a lot of time in the lounge, and watching color TV.

In summary, these responses indicate teachers see the principal primarily as a person who does clerical chores, handles severe discipline cases, confers with parents, and observes some classrooms.

Theorists in elementary school administration see the principal as an educational leader, spending most of his time in activities directly related to the instructional program. These four hundred teachers seldom mentioned the principal as being significantly involved in this role.

WHAT KINDS OF PRINCIPALS' ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN MOST HELPFUL TO TEACHERS

Four areas were outstanding here: being available to confer with teachers, working with severe discipline problems, obtaining needed materials and supplies, and conferring with parents and students. Activities occasionally mentioned were: evaluation, specifying policies, curriculm development, criticizing, and classroom observation.

Some observations expressing negative viewpoints were: "He has done nothing to help me", "I just want him to stay out of my way", "I never see him enough to help me".

HOW WAS YOUR PRINCIPAL SELECTED?

Most of the teachers believed the principal was selected by the superintendent alone and the Board confirmed his choice. In the large school system the assistant superintendent for elementary schools was thought to be involved in the hiring of new principals.

A small number of teachers suggested that the Board alone retained this responsibility. Perhaps twenty percent of the group had no idea

how the selection had been made.

Some isolated comments of interest were: The principal is selected by politics, not merit; all he needs is to be a good friend of the superintendent; if the principal does a good job the superintendent takes credit; if not, the Board was responsible. Secondary teachers are usually made elementary school principals.

WHAT WAS HIS BACKGROUND?

Some of the teachers reported that their principal had been an assistant principal. Since most area elementary schools do not have assistant principals, this was not a wide spread answer.

Most teachers reported that the principal was most likely to have had his teaching experience in a secondary school rather than on the elementary level.

A large number of teachers stated that the principal had been an athletic coach, and many expressed a concern that the elementary principalship was often a consolation reward for an ex-coach.

In the largest school systems the principal was far more likely to have been an elementary teacher rather than a secondary instructor.

Although some coaches do (and some should) become elementary school principals, this number is exaggerated by the teachers' interviewed. Other studies in Texas have shown that less than ten percent of the elementary school principals were basically coaches before going into administration.

HOW SHOULD PRINCIPALS BE SELECTED?
SHOULD THE TEACHERS CONCERNED BE INVOLVED?
IF YES, HOW COULD THE INVOLVEMENT BE ARRANGED?

The majority of the teachers involved in this survey were satisfied with the manner in which principals are usually selected: recommended by the superintendent and approved by the Board.

Most teachers felt that teachers should not be involved in the selection of principals.

A small group of teachers believed the Board alone should make the selection and another small percent thought the superintendent should make the choice by himself.

Some ways of involving teachers in the selection of new principals were:

1. Have a representative committee of teachers make recommendations to the superintendent and Board. (This was by far the most typical suggestion).
2. Have teachers sit in on interviews of the applicants.
3. Have teachers list criteria of qualifications to be applied to applicants.
4. Permit the Classroom Teachers Association to select a representative committee.
5. Some suggestions by one or two teachers were: elect by popular vote of faculty, choose in a political election, give a test and hire the person making the highest score.

I seems that "women's Lib" and "teacher militancy" have had little impact on these elementary school teachers. In some areas of the country, usually heavily unionized, teachers have a major role in selecting principals.

HOW SHOULD THE IDEAL PRINCIPAL SPEND HIS TIME?

The main suggestion teachers had was concerning the principal's availability. It seems that they thought of him as a "fireman" or "policeman", a person to be around in crises, tense situations, etc. It seems implicit in these comments that teachers often feel the principal spends an inordinate amount of time away from the building.

Other leading functions thought ideal were: maintaining discipline, and supervising the school. Also, surprisingly, many teachers believed he should spend a great deal of time in clerical work. It would seem that no one should expect a professional person to spend any appreciable time in clerical tasks. Of course, studies show that principals often spend twenty percent or more of their time in these trivial tasks; it is difficult to understand why anyone would think of this as ideal.

Some functions occasionally mentioned were curriculum planning, leading in new ideas and information, evaluating, and conferring with groups and individuals. From a theoretical ideal, it seems that these functions should be the primary responsibilities rather than the secondary duties.

This situation is another indication that the teacher's perception of the elementary school principal is quite different from the theoretical position. It is obvious, and expected, that the teacher looks at the situation as to "what can the principal do for me" attitude.

WHAT COULD HE DO TO BE OF MOST HELP TO YOU AS A TEACHER?

The interviewees interpreted this question to be almost synonomous with the preceeding one.

Their primary recommendations were to be available in emergencies or "be a rock", as one teacher expressed it. Akin to this was a felt need to have the principal be a firm disciplinarian and back up the teacher.

Several teachers wanted the principals to visit classrooms more but an equal numbers wanted them to visit less, or by implication, none at all.

A significant number of teachers believed principals could be more helpful by having increased conferences with them.

WHAT PRINCIPALS ACTIVITIES ACTUALLY IMPAIR YOUR TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS?

This question attempted to specify some of the negative feelings teachers have against their principals.

By far the most common complaint was too many unnecessary interruptions, particularly on the intercom. Three other impairments with high ratings were: (1) too many irrelevant faculty meetings, (2) too much paper work that could be avoided, and (3) unannounced classroom visits.

Other less frequent complaints were:

1. Snooping
2. Moodiness
3. Gossiping
4. Improper reprimands

5. Weighing decisions in favor of influential parents
6. Failure to follow up on discipline.

SHOULD THE PRINCIPAL'S POSITION BE RESTRICTED TO MEN?

Seventy-two percent of the sample said the sex of the principal was irrelevant but twenty-five percent of the group believed the principalship should be a male prerogative, and less than two percent said the principal should be a woman.

Over eighty percent of the elementary school principals in Texas are men which indicates that far more superintendents and boards believe men make the best elementary school principals. Research findings have never verified this practice, however.

Due to women's liberation and federal laws and guidelines it is likely that male dominance in this position may wave.

SHOULD TEACHERS BE INVOLVED IN ADMINISTRATION OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Approximately one third of the teachers categorically stated that teachers should not be involved in administration. Upon further questioning many of these teachers feared added responsibilities. Others believed schools functioned better if principals "administer" and teachers "teach".

However, most teachers surveyed thought there should be at least a limited involvement of the staff in some school activities such as: policies, scheduling, curriculum planning, inservice, school calendar, and faculty meetings.

When asked how this participation could be expedited the most common suggestion was to select an advisory committee or council that would work with the principal and represent the faculty. Others believed each grade level should have a representative while another suggestion was to leave this concern up to the professional organizations.

THE IDEAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

It is difficult, and sometimes ludicrous, to come up with an average person, but for the purpose of conjecture and interest the ideal principal as determined by this survey would be:

1. A male or female but mostly likely male.
2. Thirty-eight years of age, old enough to have considerable experience but still have some youthful vigor.
3. Have at least four or five years teaching experience before becoming an administrator, and this should have been in the elementary school.
4. He/she would have at least a Master's Degree and hold an Administrator's Certificate.
5. His/her personal characteristics would include kindness, consideration, friendliness, impartiality, patience, humor, pleasant, calmness (particularly under stress), decisiveness, outgoing, honesty, optimistic, sensitive, and religious.

It was somewhat surprising to the writer that only a few teachers mentioned intelligence, agressive leadership ability, and creativity.

FINAL COMMENT

Although only one question specifically asked for negative reactions, the writer felt, in summarizing these studies, that there was a large amount of negative feelings toward principals. Of course, there are always some adverse attitudes toward administrators but the degree of these expressions was higher than anticipated.

I believe principals need to take a closer look at the teachers' attitudes toward them and their administrative roles. There were also many indications that these elementary school principals failed to communicate to the teachers what they are doing. The writer, an experienced elementary school principal himself, believes a principal has a much more difficult position than teachers, pupils, and patrons perceive.